



Intelligence-led Counter-terrorism Operations in the UK Summer 2006: Issues and Consequences

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Theme: The pre-emptive element has become an important part of the UK's national counter-terrorism strategy.

Summary: The UK domestic counter-terrorism operations in August and September 2006, against a suspected Islamist terrorist plot to bomb transatlantic airliners and against suspected terrorist training activities, are important examples of the pre-emptive element of the UK's national counter-terrorism strategy. This resource-intensive strategy, in terms of the demands it makes on the intelligence services and the police, places great emphasis on maximising public protection by early intervention action. The alleged airliner bomb plot is believed to have been based upon the use of the easily obtained, though volatile when mixed, components for peroxide-based explosives. Such explosives pose major challenges to airline transport security arrangements, with the need to balance more intensive screening processes with the necessity to process passengers as rapidly as possible. The terrorist training case offers further potential evidence of the need for Western Europe to be alert to the domestic element within current Islamist terrorist activities. Finally, the analysis illustrates the utility of recent UK terrorism law changes in the Terrorism Act 2006, such as a longer pre-charge detention period.

Analysis:

Introduction

The general background to the UK response to 9/11 and, in particular, the response to the London bombings of July 2005, has been discussed in two previous ARIs.¹ The purpose of this paper is to offer a preliminary analysis of two high-profile, intelligence-led, anti-terrorist operations carried out in August and September 2006. The first, Operation 'Overt', carried out in early August, was a pre-emptive operation against a suspected plot to place bombs on trans-Atlantic airliners. The potential seriousness of the situation was signalled by the UK's Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC) raising the UK alert state to the highest level 'critical' between 10-13 August and then reducing the alert state down by one level to 'severe' on 14 August.² The second operation, carried out in early September was targeted against suspected training or other acts preparatory to terrorism by a different group of suspects. Because of the ongoing judicial processes this paper has to be understood as commenting on publicly available information relating to the, as yet, un-

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¹ Frank Gregory, 'Intelligence-led Counter-terrorism: A Brief Analysis of the UK Domestic Intelligence System's Response to 9/11 and the Implications of the London Bombings of 7 July 2005', ARI 94/2005, Real Instituto Elcano, Madrid, July 2005, <http://realinstitutoelcano.org/analisis/781.asp>; Frank Gregory, 'The London Bomb Incidents of 7 and 21 July 2005: "New Normality" or as Predicted?', Working Paper 10/2006, Real Instituto Elcano, Madrid, <http://realinstitutoelcano.org/documentos/245.asp>.

² Home Office, 'Threat Level Lowered to "Severe"', 13/VIII/2006, <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/about-us/news/threat-severe>, accessed 11/IX/2006.

tested in court, grounds for the pre-emptive actions taken by the police on the basis of intelligence from the security and intelligence services. In some cases it is not expected that court proceedings will commence until 2008.

In this paper three particular issues will be considered. First, the return to a higher-profile of the potential threat from terrorist actions against air-travel; secondly, the growing awareness of the problem of the radicalisation of one's own nationals and the linkage with the availability of various types of training for carrying out acts of terrorism; thirdly, these operations saw the first use of new legislative powers contained in the Terrorism Act 2006 which extended, under judicial supervision, pre-charge detention periods from 14 days to 28 days and created the new offence [S.5] of committing acts preparatory to terrorism. A concern expressed by civil liberties groups was that prolonged detention was an unnecessary deprivation of liberty and might give rise to oppressive interrogation. However, the police argument for extended detention powers was based mostly upon the time needed to gather court standard evidence from such time-consuming sources as computers and foreign jurisdictions. Indeed, research by the Metropolitan Police showed that '... in Anti-Terrorist Branch cases well over 60% of people detained do chose to exercise their right to silence...' and '... only one in 10 of those who would be considered to be leaders or directors of terrorism chose to speak'.³

Some sense of the UK concern can be gauged from the following comments. Referring to the suspected plot against airliners the Home Secretary, John Reid, said that the scale of the alleged plot was potentially bigger than 9/11 and that 'Had this plot been carried out, the loss of life to innocent civilians would have been on an unprecedented scale'.⁴ Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott commented, with awareness of the concerns in UK Muslim communities that they were being 'picked-on' in anti-terrorism operations, that 'This is not about communities: it is about criminals, murderers, people who want to commit mass murder. This is about people who might masquerade in the community, hiding behind faiths, but who want to commit acts no right-minded person would want to applaud'.⁵ Naturally the US also had major concerns as the plot was suspected of targeting commercial aircraft flying from the UK to the US. In a briefing on 10 August the US DHS Secretary, Michael Chertoff, said of the alleged plot: '... it was sophisticated, it had a lot of members and it was international in scope. This operation is in some respects suggestive of an al-Qaida plot...'.⁶ A similar suggestion is also reported to have been made by a Pakistani security official and by what *The Times* called '... senior British and US sources...'.⁷

Transatlantic Aircraft Bomb Plot

The actions of the UK counter-terrorism agencies in respect of this suspected plot are fully consistent with the UK counter-terrorism strategy's emphasis on intelligence-led pre-emptive action, whenever possible, to try and prevent terrorist attacks. This strategy component seeks to try and use intensive surveillance operations as a means of risk management. It is reflected in the Government's 'Contest' counter-terrorism strategy (also known as the '4Ps') by the strand of *Pursuit* which aims to use intelligence effectively to disrupt and apprehend suspected terrorists and under which the UK has increased joint

³ House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, 4th Report of Session 2005-06 'Terrorism Detention Powers', Volume II, Oral Evidence 28/2/06 from DAC Peter Clarke, Ev 40, Q209, HC 910-II, The Stationery Office, London, July 2006.

⁴ Stewart Tendler, 'Foiled Transatlantic Bomb Plot "was Ready to Go in Days"', *The Times*, 10/VIII/2006, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0..29389-2306721,00.html>, accessed 11/IX/2006.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ 'Homeland Security Briefing on UK Terror Arrests', *The Washington Post*, 10/VIII/2006, <http://washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/08/10/AR20060810006>, accessed 14/IX/2006.

⁷ 'Airliners Plot Suspects Appear in Court', *Guardian Unlimited*, 22/VIII/2006, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/terrorism/story/0,,1855830.html?gu>, accessed 11/IX/2006, and see also Stewart Tendler, *op. cit.*

working and intelligence sharing between governments and law enforcement agencies across the world.⁸ Operation 'Overt' had started in December 2005 and on 10 August 2006 the National Coordinator for Terrorist Investigations (NCTI), Deputy Assistant Commissioner (DAC) Peter Clarke of the Metropolitan Police revealed that 'Last night' (9 August) 'the investigation reached a critical point when the decision was reached to take urgent action to disrupt what we believed was being planned'. Air industry security officials were given that information at the same time and the police began the series of arrests and searches in London, Birmingham and High Wycombe in Buckinghamshire.⁹

According to US DHS Secretary Chertoff it had only become evident, by the end of July/early August, that the UK Operation 'Overt' was revealing that some surveillance targets' planning '... was taking the direction of targeting the United States...' (and on) '... specific routes between Britain and the United States, and which are US-flagged carriers...'.¹⁰ Published sources differ in the number of aircraft thought to have been targets, with suggestions ranging from three to 12 and another suggestion that the plot aimed to carry out a series of three plane attacks.¹¹ British official sources have suggested that reports of over 10 aircraft targeted are rather an exaggeration. Clearly flights to the US from the UK's two main international terminals, Heathrow and Gatwick, must have been prime targets. Among the carriers that have been suggested as targets are American Airlines, British Airways and United Airlines.

The alleged attack plot is generally suspected to have involved planning to use peroxide-based explosives in some liquid form together with detonation devices. The components, it was believed, would be smuggled onto aircraft disguised as drinks or some other seemingly harmless material. Hence the immediate UK and US ban on carrying any forms of liquid in cabin hand-luggage. The UK police believe that their raids provided some *prima facie* support to their concerns. DAC Peter Clarke said '... since 10 August we have found bomb making equipment. There are chemicals including hydrogen peroxide [and] electrical components...'.¹² According to US DHS Secretary Chertoff, the alleged UK plotters had '... accumulated and assembled the capabilities that they needed and they were in the final stages of planning before execution'.¹³

Peroxide-based explosives were also the bomb materials for the two London attacks of 7 and 21 July 2005. The two most common formulae for these explosives are TATP and HMTD. Other liquid-based explosives have been used in attacks on aircraft in the past. A nitroglycerin bomb in a contact lenses case was used to blow up a Philippines Airlines Manila to Tokyo flight on 11 December 1994. A similar method is believed to have been planned for use in the 'Bojinka' plot of 1995 which aimed to bring down 11 aircraft over the Pacific.¹⁴

Creating security barriers against liquid explosives is a considerable challenge for air transport security authorities in respect of passengers and cabin-luggage. Whilst baggage destined for the holds can be passed through a number of check processes relatively swiftly it is clearly much more difficult to provide similar procedures for passengers and

⁸ HM Government, 'Countering International Terrorism: The United Kingdom's Strategy', Cm. 6888, The Stationery Office, July 2006.

⁹ Stewart Tendler, *op. cit.*

¹⁰ 'Homeland Security Briefing on UK Terror Arrests', *op. cit.*

¹¹ See, for example, US News, 'Terror Suspects Planned to Use Liquid Explosives to Blow Up Planes', <http://www.usnews.com/usnews/news/articles/060810/10london.htm>, accessed 10/VIII/2006, and 'A Plot to Commit Murder on an Unimaginable Scale', *The Guardian*, 10/VIII/2006, accessed 10/VIII/2006.

¹² Metropolitan Police, 'Terrorism Charges', *Bulletin*, 0000000474, 21/VIII/2006.

¹³ 'Homeland Security Briefing on UK Terror Arrests', *op. cit.*

¹⁴ See A. Lechner, 'Gunpowder, Treason and Plot', *The Journal of International Security-Intersec*, vol. 16 (5), September 2006, p. 26-28, and Stewart Tendler, *op. cit.*, quoting Peter Neumann, Director of the Centre for Defence Studies, King's College, London.

cabin luggage without excessive delays. Moreover the current technologies cannot easily distinguish between harmless and potentially dangerous liquids. Detector machines can also cause delays through generating 'false-positive' alarms that all require investigation. In a confidential test, carried out between October 2005 and January 2006¹⁵ and noted by the US General Accountability Office, that was '... to determine how vulnerable US airlines are to suicide attacks using cheap, readily available materials. All 21 of the airports tested failed. Despite some of the investigators' carry-on baggage being swabbed for chemical testing, all of the bomb materials made it to the passenger cabins.'¹⁶

An immediate consequence of the actions against the suspected plot was the imposition by both the UK and US of stringent controls on passengers' cabin luggage in terms of bag size, a ban on all liquids except for verifiable essential medicines and baby milk and food which has to be tested by the passenger in front of security staff. As Secretary Chertoff put it: 'We are taking the step of preventing liquids from getting into the cabin to give us time to make adjustments in our current screening tactics, based upon what we learn from this investigation concerning the nature of the devices that these individuals were constructing'.¹⁷ An informal EU JHA Ministerial Meeting also emphasised the need '... for research into explosives especially targeted at work on liquid explosives'.¹⁸ The immediate consequences for air-travel was a level of disruption that, unless there was to be an on-going 'critical' alert state, was unsustainable in the longer-term because of the cost to normal economic activities. For example, on 13 August, 30% of flights out of Heathrow were cancelled to ease pressures on the security check processes and the cost to the airlines of the first day's delays was estimated at £175 million. However, from 22 September the UK transport security authority, TRANSEC, is permitting passengers to take larger cabin bags as well as handbags into the cabin but the liquids ban remains in force.¹⁹ Furthermore, from early November passengers will be allowed to take small bottles of liquid, pastes and gels into aircraft under an agreement of 27 September by the European Commission's Regulatory Committee for Civil Aviation Security which will give uniform hand-luggage rules in all EU states.²⁰

The Suspect Plotters

A key concern of the UK and other EU states is to understand and seek to counter the ways in which an individual may be radicalised and then recruited into terrorism.²¹ The UK Communities Minister, Phil Woolas, is quoted as saying it would take 'generations' to overcome extremists who wanted to destroy society.²² In this context the suspects' backgrounds are being minutely scrutinised for common points or patterns of behaviour. All of those arrested in the UK in August were British citizens, with many having Pakistani ethnic origins. Indeed there is believed to be some evidence which links the alleged UK plotters to extremists in Pakistan and the Pakistani authorities have arrested two Britons among a group of arrests in Karachi and Lahore in early August 2006. One of the two, Rashid Rauf is a brother of a person arrested in the UK. The UK police made about 25 arrests on or around 10 August but five of those arrested were later released without charge. Eight of those arrested, Ahmed Abdullah Ali, Tanvir Hussain, Umar Islam, Arafat

¹⁵ See GAO, 'Aviation Security – TSA Oversight of Checked Baggage Screening Procedures Could be Strengthened', GAO-06-869, July 2006.

¹⁶ A. Lechner. *op. cit.*, p. 28.

¹⁷ 'Homeland Security Briefing on UK Terror Arrests', *op. cit.*

¹⁸ Finland's EU Presidency, 'Fight Against Terrorism: The EU Response to the Terror Plot Disrupted in the UK', Informal JHA Ministerial Meeting, Tampere, Finland, 20-22/IX/2006, quoting from an Informal Multi-Presidency Meeting Held in London on 16/VIII/2006.

¹⁹ Home Office, 'Airport Travel Restrictions Ease Slightly', 21/IX/2006, <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/about-us/news/restrictions-eased>, accessed 21/IX/2006.

²⁰ 'Member States agree on stricter rules for air passengers', <http://www.euractiv.com/en/transport/member-states-agree-stricter-rules-air-passenge>, accessed 29/IX/2006.

²¹ Finland's EU Presidency, *op. cit.*

²² Pat Hurst, 'Britain "faces terrorism for generations"', *The Independent*, 11/IX/2006.

Waheed Khan, Assad ali Sarwar, Adam Khatib, Ibrahim Savant and Waheed Zaman were each charged on 22 August with conspiracy to murder contrary to the Criminal Law Act 1997 and preparing acts of terrorism contrary to the Terrorism Act 2006 [S.5]. They mostly gave London addresses and their ages ranged from 19 to 28.

At the same time an un-named 17 year old male was charged with possession of articles useful to a person preparing to commit acts of terrorism contrary to the Terrorism Act 2000. Cossar Ali, who is married to Ahmed Abdullah Ali, and Mehran Khan were both charged with failing to disclose information that might be of 'material assistance' in preventing the commission of a terrorist act contrary to the Terrorism Act 2000.²³ Eleven other suspects then remained in custody, including Tayib Rauf the brother of Rashid Rauf who was arrested in Pakistan. Commenting on the remaining 11 suspects, Susan Hemmings, Head of the Crown Prosecution Service's Counter-Terrorism Division, said 'We have been carefully examining and assessing the evidence against each individual with the assistance of anti-terrorist officers in order to come to charging decisions as early as possible'.²⁴ Although controversial, in civil liberties terms, the police are clearly making full use of the evidence-gathering opportunities under the extended pre-charge detention period, up to 28 days, provided under the new Terrorism Act 2006.

Because of perceptions, from within Muslim communities, that the police were arresting people without any real evidence, the authorities have given rather unprecedented details of the types of evidence they believe they will be able to present in court. DAC Peter Clarke referred to surveillance evidence including video and audio recordings obtained before 10 August, bomb-making equipment and martyrdom video recordings. There were searches of 69 sites: houses, flats, businesses, vehicles and open spaces. Among the other potential sources of evidence seized are 400 computers, 200 mobile telephones and 8,000 items of removable storage media such as memory sticks and CDs. DAC Clarke said 'So far, from the computers alone, we have removed some 6,000 gigabytes of data'.²⁵

This material will necessitate many months of work by forensic computer analysts and is one reason why trials are not expected to open until perhaps 2008. A linked matter that is still under discussion in the UK is the question of the use of intercept evidence in court. At present such evidence is not used, partly to protect sources and intelligence gathering methods and, partly, because it would be a resource-intensive task, under disclosure to the defence rules, to make available large volumes of transcript material. However, the Attorney-General, Lord Goldsmith QC, is quoted as saying that such evidence would be a 'key tool in the fight against terrorism' and Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Ian Blair has stated that 'My personal professional view is that we should be moving to the use of intercept evidence in court'.²⁶

Terrorist Training

During the investigations into the 7 July London bombings there were suggestions that some of the dead bombers might have undergone some form of 'training' in the UK and that possibility, alongside the evidence that some of those involved in the UK in the current cycle of terrorism received training in the Pakistan region, has meant that disruption of potential training is an important element in the UK's counter-terrorism strategy. In that context an operation in early September 2006 is of general importance, although unconnected with either the July 2005 London bombings or the 2006 airliners plot: 14 men were arrested in London, under the Terrorism Act 2000, after what the BBC

²³ 'Airliners plot suspects appear in court', *op. cit.*, and see also Metropolitan Police, *op. cit.*

²⁴ MSNBC News Service, 22/VIII/2006.

²⁵ Metropolitan Police, *op. cit.*

²⁶ *The Times* 22/9/06

correspondent Keith Doyle described as 'months of surveillance into those suspected of recruiting or encouraging others to take part in terrorist activities'.²⁷ Searches also took place at a large property near Crowborough in East Sussex owned by Jameah Islameah as a boys teaching facility and at several houses in London. The BBC security correspondent Gordon Corera said the arrests were linked to allegations concerning the existence of training camps in the UK for those who wished to undertake terrorist acts.²⁸ The men arrested were aged between 17 and 48 and many are thought to be British Muslims of Pakistani origin. A Metropolitan Police spokesman is quoted as saying that 'The arrests in south and east London follow many months of surveillance and investigation in a joint operation involving the Anti-Terrorist Branch, Special Branch and the Security Service'.²⁹

In this operation there has been quite a swift move to the post arrest charging stage. On 11 September four men, aged between 22 and 47 were charged with offences under the Terrorism Act 2000: Yassin Mutegombwa was charged with three counts of receiving terrorist training in the use of weapons at locations in Hampshire and Berkshire and his brother, Hassan Mutegombwa, was charged with procuring funds for terrorism. Musa Akmet and Mustafa Abdullah were charged with having information useful to a person committing an act of terrorism and Akmet was also charged with illegal possession of a firearm contrary to the Firearms Act 1968.³⁰

On 13 September a further six men, aged between 17 and 42, were charged with a range of offences under the Terrorism Act 2000 and other Acts. The following are a sample of the alleged offences. Mohammad Al-Figari was charged with offences connected to terrorist training contrary to S.6 or S.54 of the Terrorism Act 2000 and of being concerned with acts preparatory to terrorism contrary to S.6 and S.2 of the Terrorism Act 2006. Attila Ahmet was charged with, among other offences, soliciting or encouraging persons to commit murder of those who were not Muslims contrary to S.4 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861. Kadar Ahmed and a 17-year old were charged with offences connected to terrorist training contrary to S.6 or S.54 of the Terrorism Act 2000 and Ahmed was also charged with possessing information likely to be useful to a person committing an act of terrorism contrary to S.58 of the Terrorism Act 2000. Moussa Brown was charged with providing instruction or training in the making or use of firearms contrary to S.54 of the Terrorism Act 2000 and Saloum Joh was charged with possession of a prohibited firearm contrary to S.5 of the Firearms Act 1968.³¹

On 14 September two further men were charged in connection with the anti-terrorist operation on 1-2 September. Mohamed Hamid (aged 48) was charged with, among other offences, soliciting or encouraging persons to murder people who do not 'implement Allah's law' contrary to S.4 of the Offences Against the Persons Act 1861 and publishing a statement intending members of the public to be directly or indirectly encouraged or otherwise induced by the statement to commit or instigate acts of terrorism or Convention offences contrary to S1 (20) of the Terrorism Act 2006. Kibley Da Costa (aged 23) was charged with, among other offences, providing instruction or training in the use of any

²⁷ BBC News, 'Terror Police Swoop on Restaurant', 2/IX/2006, <http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/5307818.stm>, accessed 14/IX/2006.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Nick Morris, '14 Arrested as Anti-terror Police Swoop in on UK Targets', *New Criminologist*, online edition, 3/IX/2006, <http://www.newcriminologist.co.uk/news.asp?id=-1750611008>, accessed 14/IX/2006.

³⁰ BBC News, 'Four Charged with Terror Offences', 11/IX/2006, <http://bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/5336360.stm>, accessed 21/IX/2006.

³¹ UK Police Service – Major Incident, 'Anti-terrorist Branch Arrests Update', http://www.police.uk/content/article/viewarticle.asp?xslfile=xsl~transform_article.xsl&xml, accessed 21/IX/2006.

method or technique for doing anything that is capable of being done for the purposes of terrorism contrary to S.6 (1) of the Terrorism Act 2006.³²

It is clear from the details of the charges that there does exist *prima facie* evidence that is sufficient for court proceedings against a number of individuals, which reflects the general concerns that the UK counter-terrorism agencies have about what they believe to be the range of activities associated with potential Islamist terrorism incidents in the UK or originating in the UK. However, a crucial question that arises, in connection with both the alleged airliner bomb plot and the alleged activities relating to fostering terrorism and terrorist training, is whether the evidence available at the time of pre-emption and subsequently gathered will convince a jury. The outcomes of the 'ricin case' illustrate this 'beyond all reasonable doubt' evidential issue.

In what may be termed a high profile CBRN-linked new terror threat case, the 'ricin case' was concluded in April 2005 though with only one suspect, Kamal Bourgass, being convicted and sentenced to 17 years imprisonment for conspiracy to cause a public nuisance by the use of poisons and/or explosives to cause disruption, fear or injury. Bourgass was already in prison on a life sentence for the murder of DC Oake in Manchester in 2003. Four other defendants were cleared of conspiracy charges and a second related trial was abandoned. Some of these suspects were later detained on national security grounds. Commenting on the trial outcomes, an Anti-terrorist Branch Briefing Note said that if there had been an opportunity for a longer pre-charge investigative process then 'The quality of the original charging decisions would also have been higher, and it is probable that the suspect who fled the country while on bail and who eventually proved to have been a prime conspirator, would have stood trial in this country. If that had happened, the outcome of the trial process might have been very different.'³³ In his overall assessment DAC Peter Clarke, said a 'real and deadly threat' was prevented.³⁴

Conclusions: Taking the last point in the previous section first, the Terrorism Act 2006 has provided for just such a longer pre-charge investigative process and its provisions have clearly been used in relation to some of those charged in connection with the suspected airliner plot. However, the powers do not seem to have been required for those charged with terrorist training offences. In both cases the new Terrorism Act 2006 offence of carrying out acts preparatory to terrorism has been used in the charging process. This offence was controversial during the legislative stages as civil liberties lobbies suggested it could be open to too wide an interpretation.

The arrests do also seem to illustrate the concerns that the UK counter-terrorism agencies have about the scale and scope of Islamist terrorism related activity in the UK. In September 2005 the Home Secretary referred to 'hundreds of individuals who we have been watching very closely and continue to watch closely'.³⁵ Within this number there would be individuals within the 'essential' and 'desirable' investigative categories, in terms of counter-terrorism resource allocation.³⁶ Some of whom are likely to have featured in the recent arrests, as detailed earlier. Additionally, the UK has increasing knowledge of numbers of 'peripherals' who might carry out a range of supportive activities or who might

³² UK Police Service News, 'Anti Terrorist Operation 1st September', http://www.police.uk/content/article/viewarticle.asp?xslfile=xsl~transform_article.xsl&xm, accessed 22/IX/2006.

³³ Published letter from AC (SO) Andy Hayman to the Home Secretary containing briefing paper from the Metropolitan Police Anti Terrorist Branch (SO13), 'Three Month Pre-charge Detention', 6/X/2005, See fn. 7, Ev. 75, HC 910-II, *op. cit.*

³⁴ BBC News online, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4433709.stm>, accessed 4/X/2005.

³⁵ Rt. Hon. Charles Clarke, Oral Evidence to Home Affairs Committee on 'Counter-terrorism and Community Relations', 13/IX/2005, HC 462-I, Q.5, The Stationery Office, London.

³⁶ Intelligence and Security Committee, 'Report into the London Terrorist Attacks on 7 July 2005', Cm. 6785, The Stationery Office, London, May 2006, p. 8.

move from merely being facilitators to potential attackers. DAC Clarke commented that 'in terms of broad descriptions of the numbers of people who we have to be interested in, we are into the thousands'.³⁷ However, it is important for that comment, which was widely reported, to be understood as not referring to thousands of terrorist activists in the UK but, as DAC Clarke actually clarified the comment, the number refers to those who might be involved in a very wide spectrum of activities that might be linked to terrorism.

Such activities are set out in the various charges brought against suspects in these two operations. Among the recent group of suspects charged it is also noticeable that the age bracket now runs from about 17 into the 40s, whereas in previous cases the upper age group was in their 30s. This apparently increasing number of 'peripherals' has been recognized for several years.³⁸ However, after the July 2005 London bombings the government has tried to engage more closely with Muslim communities in order to counter terrorism directed radicalisation.³⁹ The imperative for closer engagement has been clearly supported by the comments in the declassified portions of the April 2006 US 'National Intelligence Estimate' (NIE). The NIE contends that 'The jihadists regard Europe as an important venue for attacking Western interests. Extremist networks inside the extensive Muslim diasporas in Europe facilitate recruitment and staging for urban attacks'.⁴⁰

At present the Muslim groups that were consulted during the July-September period in 2005 do not feel that any very visible Government responses have been delivered and are concerned about the impact, on Muslim communities, of events such as the abortive large-scale police search for a possible chemical weapon, in which one person was injured by a shot from a police firearm, in Forest Gate in London in June 2006. In that context, there are proposals to give confidential pre-operation briefings to special security-cleared Muslim community figures which may serve to better manage community tensions. However, when the Home Secretary John Reid tried to suggest that Muslim parents, at an East London meeting on 20 September, should look out for radicalisation signs in their children's behaviour, he found himself addressing what the Home Office called 'a sometimes heated meeting'.⁴¹ This was despite the fact that the Home Secretary tried to suggest that all British citizens shared 'principles of devotion to family and society, to faith and to good deeds... the values of Britain'.⁴²

Finally, the preventive security work relating to air transport and airports will remain a continuing challenge in respect of balancing the need for security 'barriers' and running a commercially viable intensively used modern transport medium. New detector technology, specially trained 'sniffer' dogs and enhanced on-board security measures all have their part to play. As Secretary Chertoff said, 'I would rather have more protection and then scale it back as we become more reassured than underestimate the problem and find out ... that we've made a tragic mistake'.⁴³

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³⁷ Reuters, 'UK Police Say Suspected Thousands of Terrorism Links', quoting BBC interview with DAC Clarke, 1/IX/2006, <http://www.alertnet.org/news/newsdesk/L01103315.htm>, accessed 25/IX/2006.

³⁸ Intelligence and Security Committee, 'Annual Report 2004-2005', Cm. 6510, para. 23, p. 12, April 2005.

³⁹ This is also a general EU priority, see: Finland's EU Presidency, *op. cit.*

⁴⁰ 'Declassified Key Judgments of the National Intelligence Estimate on Global Terrorism', *New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/27/world/middleeast/27itext.html>, accessed 28/IX/2006.

⁴¹ Home Office, 'Home Secretary Calls for Unity in Meeting with Muslim group', 20/IX/2006, <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/about-us/news/home-sec-speech>, accessed 21/IX/2006.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ 'Homeland Security Briefing on UK Terror Arrests', *op. cit.*